

## A MIDAIR ROMANCE

By MARIAN GRANT

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They both worked in the clouds, she on the top floor of a great factory building, he amid the iron framework of a huge skyscraper.

He did not know of her existence, but she felt quite sure that she should recognize him if ever they met in the street, whose noisy, busy life swept on far below their feet. She could always single him out among the mechanics working there in midair. No other workman trod the iron beams with such assured poise or squared his shoulders just as he did to the day's work. He did everything with an air of absolute confidence which thrilled and mastered her.

He was too far away for her to scrutinize his features, but she was quite sure that he had honest, clear blue eyes and brown curly hair, and his eyes could twinkle merrily. This she knew by the jovial way in which he signaled his fellow workmen.

Not that she had much time to study his mannerisms, for Ellen Mulvihill was a designer in the factory of Johnson & Co., makers of ladies' shirt waists and neckwear, and a very busy woman. Perhaps it was well for the firm, however, that while she designed stocks and fancy boas she wore in the thread of her romance, for this strangely one-sided love affair seemed to beautify the whole world for her, and while her heart sang her fingers worked deftly, and the firm reaped the profit.

If she had not been so absorbed just at this juncture she might have noticed that she was rising in the favor of her employers, but she was quite amazed one day when they voluntarily raised her salary. Quite naturally they did not offer the explanation that they feared their competitors and gave the increase as a precautionary measure. Ellen accepted it as a part of the rose color which had suddenly enveloped her entire life scheme. The extra salary had come just in time, she argued, for Trixie, the idol of her heart, or, rather, the one person who divided heart space with the hero of her mid-air dreams, had been wanting to go to dancing school these two months—in a wonderful hall where children all in white frocks and velvet faunlike suits tripped to fairy music.

Ellen lived with her married brother, and knowing ones would say that she paid a high price for the privilege. Mulvihill's wife was something of a shrew, while Ellen was of more gentle birth and breeding. The sister-in-law loved neighborhood gossip and was not above a quarrel with the other dwellers in the flat house. Ellen enjoyed her books, the hall of the firm, furnished and decorated with the dainty simplicity which marked her designs at the factory, and the championship of Trixie. The girls at the factory were kind to her, too, and then there was the quiet, shadowy church midway 'twixt home and work where she stopped each day to say innumerable "all hails" to the Blessed Mother, who must have interceded to secure for her so much happiness.

It was about a month after the memorable advance in salary that an ominous silence fell upon the Mulvihill supper table. Ellen knew instinctively that some domestic problem was coming up for discussion.

At last John Mulvihill pushed back his empty teacup and lighted his pipe. "Ellen, the Shamrock association are after giving their annual ball a week this Tuesday night, an' the wife an' meself think you'd best be goin' along."

Ellen raised startled eyes to her brother's face.

"I'm no dancer, as you well know, John, an' crowds like that give me the headache. I'd rather stop at home with Trixie."

John Mulvihill's face darkened. "You're always stoppin' at home with the child, an' it is time you went out an' met the boys an' had steady company. You're the first Mulvihill girl that ever passed twenty-five without havin' her offers to marry. You'll never marry if you stay cooped up here night after night an' not even visitin' our friends of a Sunday afternoon."

Going to the Shamrock association's ball in search of a husband? Ellen's face flamed, then turned pale. But, then, they did not know about him. The very thought seemed like treason to the strong, erect figure which never passed out of his mental vision.

"It's well enough off I am, John, without a husband, an' I see no reason why you an' Mary should want to marry me off. I'm thinkin' Trixie would miss her old auntie sorely." And she drew the child close as if to ward off with her innocent childhood some impending disaster.

Mrs. Mulvihill blazed forth on the instant.

"Yes, an' that's what the neighbors are all sayin'—that I use you as nurse-girl for the child an' dance an' go to the theater with John an' my child would suffer if it wasn't for you. They talk like you was a sort of Cinderella, an' it's tired I am of their long tongues. Did I ever ask you to spend money on Trixie when you needed it for your own clothes? Did I ever ask you to stay home with the child? It's an ungrateful lot, that's what you are, to bring me in dispute with me neighbors just because you're that upshin our friends ain't good enough for you!"

And that was how Ellen happened to go to the ball of the Shamrock association. She gave her sister-in-law carte blanche in the matter of a new dress, and that morning, returned to

good humor, reveled in the purchase and making of a real white satin frock.

But the day of the ball Ellen could hardly keep her mind on her work. Her glance would wander toward the skyscraper where he was working. She felt that he was whistling, his movements were so brisk. And John was trying, with the best intentions, to marry her off solely to maintain the honor of the Mulvihill family. She had thought of a day when she should marry, when the skyscraper was done perhaps and he become a contractor. She would not wear those nasty high stocks which she designed for other women, but dresses turned in at the neck and edged with soft lace, and he would tell her that she had the throat of a lily. Young husbands in novels always said that.

At night John led her the length of the hall with pride stamped on his face and his walk. Men were introduced to her and asked her to dance, but she became possessed of a strange terror and slipped back among the waitresses. Mrs. Mulvihill watched her with rising anger. What was the use of worrying over a real satin dress for a stupid girl like Ellen?

Ellen was thinking of Trixie and how late they would reach home and how loud the music was when she heard a hearty voice at her elbow:

"Sure, I'd be glad to meet the sister of John Mulvihill, an' it's odd I never knew you had one."

She swung around, and suddenly the lights in the room leaped into bewildering flames, the dancers mingled strangely as in a broken kaleidoscope. In the confusion one fact stood forth clearly. There was just one man in the world who could stand like that, one man who had such a pair of shoulders, and he was the man who wrought every day in the skeleton of the skyscraper.

She heard her brother say it was Dennis Gallagher, president of the Shamrock association. That was quite real to her. Of course he would be the president. Then John drifted away, and Gallagher sat beside her. It was quite awhile before she glanced up into his face. She was trying to realize the beautiful truth—that they were no longer parted in midair, but sitting side by side in a noisy, heated ballroom. She was glad it was noisy; otherwise he might hear her heart beating.

When she looked into his eyes she started, and the color came and went prettily in her cheeks. Dennis Gallagher smiled. He had seen girls look like this before. But Ellen was utterly ingenuous in spite of her twenty-five birthdays. He did not speak, and finally she said almost breathlessly:

"I thought they would be blue, an' they are brown—no, hazel."

So of course it came out. She didn't mean he should know all, and he didn't know all—just enough to make him linger through two dances and set John Mulvihill's heart swelling with pride.

A month later Ellen dropped into the quiet, shadowy church on her way to work. There were so many "all hails" to say this morning, and the church was quite empty, so with clasped hands and eyes full of happy tears she looked into the benign face of the Woman of Many Sorrows and murmured:

"Blessed Mother, do I deserve so much happiness? Am I good enough for him? He is comin' every Wednesday an' Sunday night to see me, an' by an' by it will be every night. He said so. Every day an' every night we will be together so long as we live. You who have suffered much, teach me to be strong an' brave for him."

And all that day a man working far above the din of the mighty city looked across the gap to the great factory building where he knew she bent over her work. His heart sang within him, and his blows fell full and clear, for a wonderful light and happiness had come into his life.

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